THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH PHILOLOGY STUDENTS: A DESIRABLE AIM? AN ATTAINABLE GOAL?

María del Carmen Méndez García
Universidad de Jaén

ABSTRACT

Intercultural communication and intercultural competence do not constitute an explicit component in the teacher training programmes of either prospective primary or secondary school EFL teachers in many Spanish universities. However, lecturers and professors at university agree on the development of intercultural competence as one of the most relevant skills and competence in English Philology students. This paper aims at showing that, in the absence of specific courses on the matter, prospective EFL teachers' development of intercultural competence may be uneven and dependent on personal factors. Students' current intercultural skills are here analysed at one university in Andalusia on the basis of their performance in class, in particular, in two activities carried out in an ELT methodology course which required a high degree of intercultural competence for their correct implementation.

KEY WORDS: Cultural mediator, cultural versatility/culturally versatile, EFL, English Philology students, Intercultural competence/intercultural communication.

RESUMEN

En España, la comunicación y la competencia intercultural no siempre son un componente específico dentro de los programas dedicados a la preparación de futuros profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera. No obstante, los profesores universitarios consideran que el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural es hoy en día una de las destrezas y competencias más relevantes para los alumnos de Filología Inglesa. En este artículo se aborda el tema de que, a falta de cursos específicos en la materia, el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural en los futuros profesores de inglés puede ser desigual y dependiente de factores personales. Se analizan las habilidades interculturales de los futuros licenciados en Filología Inglesa de una universidad andaluza sobre la base de su actuación en clase, en concreto, a lo largo de dos actividades desarrolladas en un curso de metodología que requieren una buena dosis de competencia intercultural para su puesta en práctica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: mediador cultural, versatilidad cultural/culturalmente versátil, inglés como lengua extranjera, estudiantes de Filología Inglesa, competencia intercultural/comunicación intercultural.

1. THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE AS A VEHICLE
FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Some scholars are of the opinion that English has mainly become a *lingua franca* and that, as such, it lacks any cultural context and nuance. They base their arguments on the fact that English may be used by people from different non-English-speaking countries (e.g. a Japanese and a Spanish interlocutor) in culturally neutral circumstances, that is to say, in environments where the cultural elements of the English-speaking communities are irrelevant. A further argument refers to the teaching of English as a mere vehicle of communication for whatever reason (social advancement, mobility of students, etc.) in, for instance, some Arab countries where the context of this ELT process is always reduced to promoting the Arab world and values, with no reference being made either to the English-speaking world or even to western countries and lifestyle (Byram, "Symposium").

Another way of approaching the issue is that, no matter who the speakers or what the speech situations are, English, as any other linguistic code, is closely related to its communities, which make it their best means of everyday communication and which turn it into a highly culturally determined and loaded language. The best argument in this sense is the fact that the creation of artificial languages such as Esperanto has always resulted in a failure; this failure can be attributable to the fact that these artificial codes are languages devoid of any meaning, languages in which nobody is able to think or, even worse, feel (Valdes 1).

Throughout the history of foreign language teaching, more attention has been paid to the instruction of the linguistic component than to the other elements, since it has been assumed that being proficient at a non-native language mainly consisted in the mastery of the linguistic skills. It is during the twentieth century that researchers and practitioners have discovered that successful interaction mainly depends on communicative skills. Therefore, foreign language teaching during the second half of this century has been concerned with developing in students the appropriate linguistic and communicative skills. However, in the last two or three decades of the twentieth century and in the first years of the twenty first century, the scholarly debate (Buttjes; Kordes; Kramsch; Seelye) has emphasised the fact that interaction among members of diverse cultural contexts requires a very specific type of expertise, known as "intercultural communicative competence" (ICC), only acquired by some people after the foreign language teaching-and-learning process.

In *Intercultural Experience and Education* Alred, Byram & Fleming distinguish between intercultural experience, the nowadays inevitable contact with people from other cultures, and "being intercultural," which involves a much more critical, analytic and reflected stance. They point out that this experience, apart from challenging, can be unsettling since it implies questioning and understanding as relative one's so far universally assumed cultural patterns, assumptions and beliefs.

Guilherme defines "intercultural communication" as the "ability to interact effectively with people from cultures that we recognise as different from our

own" (297-300). Therefore, she equates intercultural communication with "effective interaction" in the sense of "accomplishing a negotiation between people, based on both culture-specific and culture-general features, that is, on the whole respectful of and favourable to each." Acquiring "intercultural competence" has nowadays become one of the main goals of foreign language instruction for more and more practitioners, since it goes beyond "communicative competence," the mere exchange of information, requiring the establishment and maintenance of relationships (Byram, *Teaching* 3).

Developing intercultural communication is considered a complex and difficult phenomenon because it explicitly or implicitly implies widening one's horizons and adopting a respectful and tolerant attitude towards otherness. This new conception of the "intercultural being" in an intercultural world has provided foreign language teaching with a new educational dimension because it not only implies learning a new linguistic system, but also accepting and valuing a different way of living and understanding life. It is only by knowing about and by striving to understand different peoples that our own cultural system and values can be appreciated in their relative and not in their absolute worth.

In this sense, foreign language learning in context, that is to say, the connection between a linguistic code and its people, seems to be paramount. In the case of English, it is the native language of an extremely diverse number of communities the world over. Even though it is impossible to deal extensively with all of them in the foreign language class, the in-depth analysis of key sociocultural aspects of the most relevant English speaking communities on the different continents is a valuable tool in itself, constituting knowledge of the target community/ies a first step towards the achievement of intercultural competence, a much more demanding process relying not only on cognition, but also on attitudes and skills.

2. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AS A DESIRABLE GOAL AT UNIVERSITY

Originating in other disciplines such as social psychology and communication, intercultural communication has permeated foreign language education as the circumstances that allow a greater mobility of individuals have shown that the achievement of linguistic proficiency is not a guarantee of success in intercultural exchanges. Communication between members of different cultures does not seem to be attained until real understanding, which rests upon the participants' intercultural competence, is accomplished.

A recent study (unpublished) was carried out in six of the eight universities in Andalusia that offer a degree in English Philology by the Committee in charge of the "Experiencia piloto para la implantación del crédito europeo (ECTS) en la titulación de Filología Inglesa en las universidades andaluzas." A questionnaire was distributed among almost a hundred Filología Inglesa lecturers and professors who were inquired, among other aspects, about the ten most important capacities a future philologist should have. They were offered a list of ten abilities and were

asked to organise them in a decreasing order of importance; they were likewise asked to add further abilities they considered pertinent. The results show that lecturers and professors see the development of intercultural competence in their students as one of the prominent goals of the entire degree. Even though it was ranked differently at the six institutions (Universidad de Almería, Universidad de Cádiz, Universidad de Córdoba, Universidad de Granada, Universidad de Huelva and Universidad de Jaén), intercultural communication occupies a relevant position in the abilities a future philologist should exhibit, with institutions such as the Universidad de Jaén ranking it second after the all-important command of the English language in the written and spoken media.

However, since no specific training on intercultural communication is offered in any of these universities in the wide array of English Philology courses, practitioners at these institutions seem to assume that the development of intercultural competence is either achieved as a result of students' enrolment in courses of a literary or linguistic nature or that it is a factor depending on personality traits which they cannot have access to.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In this paper, intercultural communication is looked at in the light of foreign language teaching at one of these institutions. Indeed, the starting point is that no explicit course is offered on intercultural competence at a pre-doctoral level and that some lecturers and professors would argue that intercultural communication is implicitly favoured in their literary or their EFL methodology classes.

The main research question that guides this study is:

– Do English Philology students develop intercultural competence as a result of their current training?

Additionally, this study aims to answer the following questions:

– Do English Philology students have a sound knowledge of the cultural reality of English-speaking countries?
– Do English Philology students understand other cultures and realities?
– Do English Philology students show in their performances the achievement of an open mind and an intercultural stance?

In order to answer these questions taking the foreign language class as a basis and students' spontaneous performance in it, an observational approach was considered appropriate.

Of the different courses offered within the degree of "English Philology," some of them give students the opportunity to work on aspects and contents of the syllabus that are relevant to them and to exploit them at will. One of these courses, "Pedagogy of Communicative Skills" ("Didáctica de las Destrezas Comunicativas

en Lengua Inglesa"), was selected because the nature of the course and the flexibility in the study of its contents placed great importance on students' initiative and participation. Therefore, students' performances during a whole term were observed, this article reporting on the most illustrative findings related to students' intercultural competence.

4. CONTEXTUAL CLUES TO THE STUDY

The course "Pedagogy of Communicative Skills" combines theory and practice, dealing with the four communicative skills —listening, speaking, reading and writing— (in isolation and in their integration) in lessons which a) combine the lecturer's theoretical explanation with students' contributions and suggestions, and b) lessons in which students are asked to work (individually or in group) on a particular skill by means of a presentation. All the practical sessions, which take place once the most relevant theoretical aspects of a specific skill have extensively been dealt with, have been prepared and presented by students themselves under the lecturer's supervision; the goal of these activities is to give students practice in the pedagogy of the different skills in a foreign language class, to reflect upon the activity they are proposing and to foster their critical and informed approach to the reading, listening, writing or speaking material they will hopefully be working with.

As an optional subject in the degree of English Philology, "Pedagogy of Communicative Skills" is chosen by a different number of students every year. Even though this particular academic year about 45 students have enrolled in the course, 25 to 30 regularly attend the lessons. They are generally interested in ELT methodology. Although a reduced group of them are participative and willing to be the protagonists of their teaching and learning process, the majority is less outgoing and expect the teacher to lecture while they take notes.

Three to five class-time hours were devoted to the presentations of each skill, including a discussion and debate stage, which shed light on relevant issues of each presentation from the perspective of the methodology of the skill in question.

Students were asked to prepare a project on any of the four skills and/or integrated skills. The presentation included three different parts:

a) An introduction in which factors such as the level, intended audience, objectives, steps to follow, material, etc. were stated. Most of the students used this phase in order to justify their choice of materials, tasks, etc.
b) The implementation of the practical material, which generally involved a warming up, followed by a listening, reading or writing text, accompanied by a battery of text-related tasks, and a follow-up.
c) A conclusion, in which the whole process was analysed on the basis of the methodology of the skill in question.

The project itself was very much determined by the type of material chosen since both authentic and simulated-authentic/non-authentic material together with

published material (in any of its formats: textbooks, didactic manuals, leaflets, advertisements, films, etc.) or the material elaborated by students themselves was allowed. This provided the practical lessons with a limitless array of options at students' disposal; students' imagination and assumptions regarding foreign language teaching were of utmost importance.

The quality of the presentations varied. Assessment was done using criteria such as the aims of the presentation, students' confidence and command of classroom management techniques during the presentation, familiarity with the literature and the methodological issues of each skill, coherence between students' goals, methodological considerations and their actual implementation of the listening, speaking, reading or writing activity, the activity in itself and the battery of accompanying exercises, and the consistency of the final conclusions. All in all, students were asked to develop a critical and informed approach to edited material and an informed and comprehensive approach when designing their own material.

5. STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL SKILLS AT PLAY: TWO CULTURALLY LOADED READING PRESENTATIONS

At this stage, it is necessary to state that the lecturer has not set any limits in connection with the content of the spoken or written texts used in class. As stated above, English Philology in Andalusia does not incorporate any specific course on the pedagogy of the foreign culture or on (inter)cultural competence. In this sense, students' contributions and achievements are to be attributed to their own interests, experiences and personalities.

As a consequence, just a few of the presentations dealt with some sociocultural aspect of the English-speaking world (Bob Marley as a representative of Jamaican music, an abridged version of Hamlet as a way of introducing secondary school pupils to English literature, American adverts as a tool for the study of certain communicative functions), most of them being as general as "body parts," "the mystery of the diamonds," etc.

The two reading projects examined below have an apparent cultural load in common. This is possibly the only link between them. The abundant differences embody two opposite approaches to the cultural phenomena in the foreign language class. For practical reasons, they will be referred to as "Project A" and "Project B."

5.1. Project A

Project A was the output of two male students. They handed out photocopies of the material they had prepared for the whole class, which had a classical layout: a reading text at the top of the page accompanied by a battery of exercises at the bottom.

Project A was introduced by means of a brief warming-up, which invited the whole class to debate the concept of "United Kingdom" and "Great Britain" at the same time as they were encouraged to tell any British joke they knew. The fact that no satisfactory answer was provided to these simple questions shows that students who are going to hold a degree in English Philology within a year seem to have an extremely deficient basic cultural knowledge.

Once the topic was introduced, the visual support was presented and examined in turn: a poster with the Union Jack and the flags of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, a map of the United Kingdom, with the capital cities of its different parts, and a caricature representing the four national identities or characters in the United Kingdom.

Students then did a silent reading exercise. The text, of an intermediate or upper-intermediate level, had been taken from published material and contained information about the United Kingdom. Indeed, the parts, peoples and languages of the UK were briefly referred to in the first paragraph; the most relevant features of Welshmen, Scotsmen, Irishmen and Englishmen were described together with their relationship with British jokes in the second paragraph; and the last part of the passage showed the attributed differences among these people in a famous British joke in which an Englishman, a Welshman, a Scotsman and an Irishman answer the question "What would you do if you won a lot of money?" Although unnoticed by students, this activity constitutes an obvious instance of the analysis of auto-stereotypes, a highly productive self-reflection process concerning how a particular community views itself.

After the silent-reading stage, students were instructed to do the three exercises they had been given: the first one implied suggesting a title (a "skimming exercise" as the students who did the presentation put it), the second one consisted in a true/false activity ("scanning") focused on the context of the text and the third one in a vocabulary exercise. These tasks were done and checked quickly.

No follow-up was proposed and no further aspects were added.

5.2. PROJECT B

The author of Project B, a female student, used a map of the world placed in the centre of the blackboard as a visual aid for the introduction to the whole project: "Christmas around the world," which she wrote on the upper part of the blackboard.

Once the topic was stated, she asked a series of general questions as a warming-up: "do you know anything about Christmas in any other countries apart from Spain?," "have you ever spent Christmas abroad?," "would you like to know how Christmas is celebrated around the world?" etc. Her classmates knew very little about Christmas outside Spain, as none of them had ever been away from home during this holiday. Therefore, they expressed their interest in the topic and were willing to take part in the reading activity.

Students were asked to imagine the classroom was the world, and each student a country.

The student who had designed the presentation provided the necessary data: first of all, she acknowledged having difficulties in finding an appropriate reading text, which she has finally been able to select after visiting the web page "WorldView! Christmas.com Around the World." This is a web site in which a world map is shown and you can tick any country; once at the requested page, an array of culturally relevant information is offered: traditions, recipes, Christmas carols, etc., although, for the foreign language-and-culture teacher (Byram et al.) the most valuable aspects are personal letters or texts written by the people of any country about their own experiences and feelings at this time of the year, a wonderful sample of the "internal perspective" Byram defends in the treatment of the alien cultural system in the foreign language class (*Cultural* 21).

The student specified that she had printed one page per country and that she was going to hand out randomly one sheet to each person in class. She had used five different types of coloured paper, one for each continent: Blue for Africa, green for America, red for Asia, yellow for Europe and white for Oceania. Each colour represented a continent and each sheet of paper contained the Christmas tradition of a given country. After that, she encouraged her classmates to read their texts silently: the first time for the gist, the second for a focus on unknown vocabulary and on the content, with the aim of each individual producing a three to four line summary of the features of their country and a list of two or three unknown words.

Students were then able to work in groups created on the basis of the colour of their sheet, that is to say, all those students having a yellow page would work together as a continent, in this case as Europe. The idea was to reach a consensus on traditions shared by a continent or a large number of countries belonging to it. For that, a real "cultural" dialogue and exchange of information and knowledge was necessary.

The final step was to have a whole class debate in which common and differing aspects on the five continents could be discovered. A summary of the contributions of each continent-group was recorded on the blackboard. As a follow-up activity, students were invited to use the information on the blackboard to speak about their "ideal Christmas" and/or to work at home on the unknown vocabulary.

At the end of the activity, the participants admitting enjoying it, having learnt about things they do not usually deal with in the foreign language classroom and being more aware of the culture-bound meaning of "Christmas."

6. DISCUSSION: ACTIVITIES THAT LEAD TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

Table 1 below summarises the defining features of the two presentations and table 2 expresses knowledge, attitudes and qualities that directly relate to intercultural communication:

MARÍA DEL CARMEN MÉNDEZ GARCÍA

TABLE 1. DEFINING FEATURES OF THE CULTURALLY LOADED PRESENTATIONS		
Two Culturally Loaded Reading Presentations		
VARIABLES	PROJECT A	PROJECT B
1. Number of students in charge of the presentation	Two	One
2. Type of text	Published material	Published material (internet)
3. Level	Intermediate/upper-intermediate	Advanced
4. Different texts used	One	Twenty-five to thirty coloured pages
5. Cultural content	– The United Kingdom: peoples and languages – National stereotypes within the UK – British jokes	– Christmas around the world: common and differing features
6. Visual support	– The Union Jack and the flags of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – A map of the U. K. illustrating its parts and capital cities – A caricature of the different national characters/identities	– Map of the world
7. Warming-up	– The concept of UK and GB – British jokes – Symbols of the UK: The Union Jack and other flags – Geography of the UK – National characters/identities	– Christmas around the world – Christmas in Spain vs. Christmas in other countries
8. Type of activities	Published material	Students' material
9. Number & aim of activities	Three: 1. Suggest a title for the text : skimming 2. True/false: scanning 3. Explain the meaning of certain words: vocabulary	Three: 1. Summary of the key features of Christmas in a given country after the silent reading 2. Group work: key features of the countries on the same continent 3. Whole class discussion: common elements of Christmas in the world
10. Follow-up	No follow-up	– My ideal Christmas – Unknown vocabulary

TABLE 2: KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND QUALITIES DIRECTLY RELATED TO A CULTURAL AND/OR THE INTERCULTURAL APPROACH		
a. Goal of the activities	"To combine the teaching of English with a general knowledge of the country"	"To make explicit that we are not alone in the world, that there are others who do not have to do everything in the same way we do"

b. Attitude of the students in charge of the presentation towards other cultures	Clearly negative: one of them had been to the UK and only spoke about negative aspects of the country (weather, food, etc.) and its members (cold, distant)	Clearly open-minded and positive: receptive and very respectful towards otherness
c. Attitude they foster in their classmates / prospective pupils	Negative approach to other cultures; stereotyped vision	Open-mindedness
d. Analysis of cultural phenomena	Partial, not on an informed basis. Confirmation of hetero-stereotypes	On an informed basis and more neutral and/or critical
e. The students in charge of the presentation as prospective language- and-culture teachers	Not certainly a culturally versatile teacher nor an intercultural mediator	Aware of cultural relativity, an intercultural mediator

Differences between both projects can be perceived at a glance. Some of them did not seem to affect the success or failure of the activity for the promotion of intercultural communication: the number of students taking part in the presentation, the type, level and number of texts used.

The remaining factors, on the contrary, seemed to be determinant in favouring or hindering the development of intercultural competence. The cultural contents chosen appeared to be a priori appropriate from a culturally pedagogical perspective if the minimum cultural content proposed by Byram et *al.* (51-52) is taken into account. Byram et *al.* distinguish nine blocks of minimum cultural content to be incorporated into the foreign language class: 1. social identity and social groups; 2. social interaction; 3. behaviour and beliefs; 4. sociopolitic institutions; 5. socialization and life cycle; 6. national history; 7. national geography; 8. national cultural heritage; 9. stereotype and national identity.

Consequently, the texts proposed here favour the reflection upon two of the most widely recognised key cultural areas. On the one hand, Project A insisted on the "United Kingdom, its peoples and languages," that is to say, social identity and social groups (1 above); some of the issues raised by this first text, such as "auto-stereotypes within the UK" and "British jokes," exhibit considerably insightful cultural information, thus entering the realm of stereotype and national identity (9 above). Neither auto-stereotypes nor humour are frequently explored in EFL textbooks in Spain, as noted by Méndez García. On the other hand, Project B enters the realm of one of the most widely acknowledged sociocultural topics, "folklore and traditions" (Sercu). Christmas constitutes, no doubt, an excellent issue to involve most Western students both cognitively and attitudinally since it is generally associated with positive values and circumstances. To sum up, the two cultural elements in both types of texts turn out to be culturally significant and their consideration in the foreign language class is desirable. Apart from the emphasis on the topic, prospective teachers need to be very much aware of the depth and the breadth

of the cultural information they may be passing on to their pupils. It is obvious that the texts presented were short and the amount of information contained not very extensive; however, the interesting fact is that it was not superficial at all.

The visual support bears apparently a less obvious relation with the promotion of intercultural communication, but images, pictures and maps are the best and most illustrative tools when it comes to introducing a concrete aspect of the foreign reality. They are likewise considered to help motivate and engage students in the activity. In this respect, it is worth indicating that the visual support which accompanied Project A (the Union Jack and the flags of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the map of the UK and, chiefly, a caricature of the different national characters) were more culturally representative and shocking and called students' attention towards the matter more effectively than the world map in Project B.

As to the elements analysed in the warming-up stage, both projects incorporated a meaningful and well-structured lead-in to the whole activity. The lead-in to Project A concentrated on the United Kingdom; the lead-in to Project B was not so culturally specific (Christmas in the world), although it made use of the pedagogically appropriate technique of comparison and contrast with students' culture, in this case Spanish culture.

So far, the three elements contemplated reveal a similarly adequate treatment of the sociocultural component, although the visual support of Project A could be deemed as more alluring.

As far as the tasks are concerned, in Spain, students have to be aware that selecting activities from most published materials at pre-university education without further additions (Project A) generally means having a strong focus on form and a superficial focus on culture, because it is mainly the successful implementation of the specific skill dealt with, reading in this case, that takes precedence over the cultural aspects that can be extracted and expanded after the process. Nevertheless, preparing one's own material (Project B) offers an array of almost limitless possibilities to the teacher (table 1, variables 8 and 9). This also applies to the follow-up stage, not always explicitly incorporated into the reading section in published materials (variable 10).

The goal of the activity as perceived by the students in charge of its implementation (table 2, variable a.) turns out to be a clearly relevant factor. When Project A was handed in in its written version, its authors affirmed that:

> In this activity we tried to join (sic) the teaching of English [the English language and the reading skill in the English language] with a general knowledge of the country. It is important to show culture [...] to students, and one possibility is to tell them a joke. Jokes usually convey cultural knowledge to be understood, so it's a good way to introduce students to the English [-speaking] world.

As a result, their main objective seemed to have been fulfilled in the practical session they had given, the consideration of jokes as a pertinent sociocultural issue. However, when, at the debate stage they were asked why they had chosen

such a culturally loaded passage, they affirmed that they had selected that particular text chiefly for its humorous tone (fair enough, humour is always welcome in the foreign language classroom!). On second thought, they also admitted that they were interested in British society and culture, but they acknowledged having a very limited knowledge and not feeling at ease exploiting texts with a high sociocultural tone: in the lead-in stage they had been hesitant and had to ask the lecturer basic aspects such as what the difference between the "United Kingdom" and "Great Britain" was.

A much more ambitious goal underlay Project B. In the written version of her presentation, the student thoroughly justified the tasks in connection with the reading skill and the integration of skills, the main issue of the unit. Additionally, she stated that one of the advantages of the activity was "to learn culture in a funny way" and this was also one of her aims:

> My aims were very simple. I wanted to make explicit that we are not alone in the world, that there are others who do not have to do everything in the same way we do. I also wanted to teach about different cultures by making it dynamic.

The goal this particular student had specified is, undoubtedly, a truly intercultural objective, an objective which favours intercultural communication and education for citizenship; although unconsciously, she was referring to "cultural relativity," the chief goal of intercultural teaching according to Mariet (84), the understanding that there exist other ways of seeing life, which are neither better nor worse than our own.

Furthermore, one can infer that one's personal and attitudinal stance seems to be a key element in promoting intercultural communication skills (table 2, variables b, c and d). After the implementation of Project A, the lecturer used it as a starting point in order to get to look into the whole class' knowledge and opinions concerning the English-speaking world, especially those of the two protagonist students. Only one of them had been to an English-speaking country, the UK, and he explained the bad time he had had there (the cold and reserved people, the "strange" way of life, the disgusting food, the awful weather, etc.), maintaining that he did not feel the need of visiting this country again. He showed a very partial and stereotyped knowledge of British society and an evidently negative attitude towards other cultures. If this had been his secondary school class, he would have encouraged negative perspectives of otherness in his students, he would have reinforced Spanish students' hetero-stereotypes (images a community has of a different one) of Britain and British people and he would have reassured them in their ethnocentric view of the world, making them believe that the way things are done in Spain is the way things should be done everywhere, that is to say, making them believe that their relative cultural patterns are universal. It is easy to see why most secondary Spanish teachers report their pupils as holding negative views of other countries and peoples (Méndez García & Sercu).

On the basis of these students' contribution, the lecturer called students' attention to the fact that different people have different experiences and perspec-

tives, and asked the rest of the class whether they had been to an English-speaking country:

– Out of 25 to 30 students in class, only 3 had been to an English-speaking country, generally the United Kingdom and, concretely, England (one of them was the student previously referred to).
– Of the 3 students who had been to England, one clearly held negative views of the country and its people, and the other two corroborated the same negative feelings and experiences. However, the latter expressed they would not mind to go back to the "foreign land."
– Of the remaining students in class, only 6 or 7 expressed their interest in having first hand experience in an English-speaking community, although they did not intend to do it in a near future with the exception of 4 students who were going to take part in an exchange programme in England.
– When asked about their pre-university "cultural training," only 2 or 3 indicated their teachers had devoted some minute part of their lessons to commenting on sociocultural issues, but they had never been given much relevance in themselves.

These students have been at university for about 3 years, have just one more academic year before obtaining their degree and, most important, will shortly become Spanish teachers of English at secondary school level during the following 40 years.

However, the balance was a little bit redressed with Project B, which, at least, showed that one person in the classroom cared about otherness. She gave evidence of an open-minded and respectful attitude towards other peoples and cultures, she fostered identical open-mindedness and cultural understanding in her classmates and had a wider, more informed and less biased knowledge of the world. At no time did she promote ethnocentric attitudes and she exhibited and shared with her classmate an always necessary childlike (i.e. uninhibited and natural) curiosity in her approach to foreign cultures.

Regarding the methodology of the presentations, Project A would have benefited from a follow-up in which, for instance, the superficial analysis of national identities in the text resulted in a thorough study of the phenomenon of stereotyping, with an explicit reference to auto-stereotypes (images a given people has of itself), both in Spain and in the United Kingdom, and hetero-stereotypes (images a community has of a different one) between, for instance, Spain and the United Kingdom. Secondly, in Project B some students expressed their interest in getting the sheet of any English-speaking country, which means that one possible option could be to limit the nations selected to the English-speaking world by, for instance, opting for more than one type of text from each country so that every participant has different information and the information-gap is created.

To sum up, the students who presented Project A are not at this moment either culturally versatile or intercultural mediators, two fundamental features in a foreign language-and-culture educator. Meyer refers to cultural mediation in the

following terms: "Intercultural competence, as part of a broader foreign speaker competence, [...] includes the capacity of stabilising one's self-identity in the process of cross-cultural mediation and of helping other people to stabilise their self-identity" (37). "Cultural versatility" is defined by Robinson as:

> For language learners who already have an established culture, second cultural acquisition implies the development of cultural versatility. What we want to strive for is what I call "the color purple" [...] The idea behind the "color purple" is that it represents a synthesis between the learner, his or her own culture, and the new cultural objective to be acquired. (16)

By contrast, the student who designed and implemented Project B is, conscious or unconsciously, very much aware of cultural relativity and is able to become a cultural mediator. No doubt, her prospective students will benefit from her open-mindedness and respectful attitude towards other peoples and cultures.

7. CONCLUSION

The foregoing data reveals English Philology students' reduced and limited knowledge about otherness and, in particular, about basic and defining aspects of English-speaking countries (e.g. the difference between Great Britain and the United Kingdom). In the degree of "English Philology" at the University of Jaén, as in many other universities in Spain, there is only one year-long course or two one-term courses (the option chosen by this University) on English-speaking communities, "History and Culture of English-speaking Countries" ("Historia y Cultura de los Países de Habla Inglesa"), which, in this case, is currently given by the Department of History and consists mainly in the history and climate of the UK. If this is compared with the education students are offered in some other courses, of a literary and linguistic nature, it is not surprising to discover a somehow encyclopaedic knowledge in our students —"C" culture as Valdes puts it (28)— but great deficiencies in the appreciation of everyday issues —"c" culture, Valdes (28)— and, hence, in the basic understanding of everyday patterns in the target community/ies.

It can likewise be inferred that an inadequate and limited cultural knowledge is dangerous in itself; this is due to the fact that it only allows a biased and prejudiced approach to the foreign reality. Students' deficient knowledge seems to lead to a lack of understanding of English-speaking societies and their people. Evident stereotyped and partial views and representations of Britain come to the foreground. The high degree of ethnocentrism exhibited by students cannot be overlooked.

As far as students' performance is concerned, only one person in the class seems to be open-minded towards otherness and act accordingly. The intercultural stance, therefore, is barely perceived in the English Philology class as a group. This study seems to suggest that, in the absence of specific training, developing intercultural communication skills partly depends on personality traits, which are, of course,

moulded by a whole life experience in a socio-economic, educational, socio-cultural, familiar, national, etc. group. Together with personality factors, and closely related to them, intercultural communication skills seem to be determined by attitudinal stances. A dose of tolerance, curiosity and receptiveness to new ideas and viewpoints proves in this sense paramount in a foreign language teacher.

A deeper and more informed knowledge about the English-speaking world, although necessary, as stated above, is not enough. Recent research has shown that the way in which teachers were taught as students affects the way in which they eventually shape their teaching practice. It seems obvious that, in the same way as the studies of English Philology at the Universidad de Jaén include courses on ELT methodology such as "Pedagogy of Communicative Skills" or "Pedagogy of Linguistic Components" ("Didáctica de los Componentes Lingüísticos del Inglés"), students would very much benefit from explicit instruction on "intercultural communication" and/or "the pedagogy of the cultural component," which would require the design of specific courses.

If prospective foreign language teachers are not properly trained at university, they may not be prepared to be successful professionals in the future. The guidelines of the Spanish National Curriculum at pre-university level, more than a decade ago in 1990, already established that learning a foreign language "allows students to be open to other ways of understanding reality, enriches students´ cultural world and promotes the development of attitudes of openness and relativity towards other cultures" (Ministerio de Educación y Cultura 17, my translation).

The foregoing arguments seem to support the idea that English Philology students, at least at this specific university, do not seem to develop intercultural competence as a result of their current training programme, that is to say, in spite of being a desirable aim as university lecturers and professors state, intercultural competence is not, at the time being, an attainable goal for most English Philology students. This implies that intercultural training for prospective teaching should be provided as a subject-matter in itself which reflects upon all-important issues such as the relationship between language, culture and thought, the concept of identity (in its local and/or regional, national and international perspective), the process of socialization, prejudices, auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes, etc.

If the aim of the studies of English Philology, the degree held by most EFL secondary school teachers in Spain, is preparing good foreign language teachers, we may have the feeling of success. If we are contemplating a more ambitions goal, educators in the widest sense of the word, intercultural speakers, instructors conscious of what European citizenship implies, culturally versatile individuals, then there is still a long way to go. There will always be sensitive and tactful teachers, but relying on good-will and personal abilities does not seem to be the best choice. It is our duty to try and work on improving teacher training programmes so that not only well-prepared foreign language teachers are trained but also truly foreign language-and-culture educators.

WORKS CITED

ALRED, G., M. BYRAM, & M. FLEMING. *Intercultural Experience and Education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2002.

BUTTJES, D. "Mediating Languages and Cultures: The Social and Intercultural Dimension Restored." *Mediating Languages and Cultures*. Ed. D. Buttjes & M. Byram. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991. 3-16.

BUTTJES, D. & M. BYRAM. *Mediating Languages and Cultures*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991.

BYRAM, M., *Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 1989.

—— *Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998.

—— ed. *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Language Teaching and Learning*. London: Routledge, 2000.

—— Symposium on Intercultural Competence and Education for Citizenship. University of Durham, March 2003.

—— *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevendon: Multilingual Matters, 1997.

BYRAM, M., *et al. Teaching-and-Learning Language-and-Culture*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1994.

BYRAM, M. & M. FLEMING, eds. *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective: Approaches Through Drama and Ethnography*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.

GUILHERME, M. "Intercultural Competence." *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Language Teaching and Learning*. Ed. M. Byram. London: Routledge, 2000. 297-300.

KORDES, H. "Intercultural Learning at School: Limits and Possibilities." *Mediating Languages and Cultures*. Ed. D. Buttjes & M. Byram. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991. 287-305.

KRAMSCH, C. "The Privilege of the Intercultural Speaker." *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective: Approaches Through Drama and Ethnography*. Ed. M. Byram & M. Fleming. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 16-31.

MARIET, F. "Interculturalising the French Educational System: Towards a Common European Perspective." *Mediating Languages and Cultures*. Ed. D. Buttjes & M. Byram. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991. 84-99.

MÉNDEZ GARCÍA, M.C. *La cultura extranjera en los libros de inglés de bachillerato*. Jaén: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Jaén, 2003.

MÉNDEZ GARCÍA, M.C., & L. SERCU. "Teachers' Perceptions of Their Pupils' Culture-and-Language Learning Profile." *Language Teachers and Intercultural Competence*. Ed. Sercu et al. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. Forthcoming.

MEYER, M. "Developing Transcultural Competence: Case Studies of Advanced Foreign Language Learners." *Mediating Languages and Cultures.* Ed. D. Buttjes & M. Byram. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991. 136-158.

MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN Y CULTURA. *Lenguas extranjeras: secundaria obligatoria.* Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, 1990.

ROBINSON, G. "Second Culture Acquisition." Southwest Conference on Language Teaching. 1994.

SEELYE, H.N. *Teaching Culture: Strategies for Intercultural Communication.* Lincolnwood: National Textbook, 1993.

SERCU, L. *Acquiring Intercultural Competence from Textbooks: The Case of Flemish Adolescent Pupils Learning German.* Leuven: Leuven UP, 2000.

—— *et al. Intercultural Competence Teaching in Practice: An Investigation of Foreign Language Teachers' Views and Teaching Practices in 7 Countries.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. Forthcoming.

SERCU, L., E. BANDURA, P. CASTRO, L. DAVCHEVA, C. LASKARIDOU, U. LUNDGREN, M.C. MÉNDEZ GARCÍA & P. RYAN. *Language Teachers and Intercultural Competence.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. Forthcoming.

VALDES, J.M., ed. *Culture Bound.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE...